

Massachusetts Registry of Vital Records and Statistics (RVRS)

Cause of Death Coding – the Pregnancy Question Quick Reference Guide

Background

- The task of the medical certifier is to determine the cause(s) and manner of death and to verify the pregnancy status and obstetric history of female decedents.
- Documentation of current or recent pregnancy is important in determining whether pregnancy was a factor that resulted in, or contributed to, a death.
- In 2020 for example, Massachusetts data identified 20% of potential pregnancy-associated deaths to be false positive. Of these 90% came from inaccurate marking of the pregnancy question – meaning these people were not actually pregnant within the past year but marked as such.
- RVRS and the Massachusetts Maternal Mortality Review Committee, as well as the CDC Division of Reproductive Health, rely on accurate pregnancy status information not only for official maternal mortality statistics but also for making recommendations for maternal mortality prevention.

Completing the Pregnancy Status Question

- The fact and timing of pregnancy should be reported in Part I and/or Part II of the death certificate if the certifier believes it contributed to death. The pregnancy status question is found in the ‘Other Factors’ section that follows.
- As appropriate, consult medical records, laboratory tests, consider clinical history, and other available information before completing the question.
- Shown below - in the MA Vitals Records Information Collaborative (MAVRIC) electronic death registration system - in the ‘Other Factors’ section is the pregnancy question.

The screenshot displays the MAVRIC TESTING AND TRAINING SITE interface. The header includes the Boston Medical Center logo and user information (MedCertBos1, Logout). The main title is 'MAVRIC TESTING AND TRAINING SITE' and 'MA-RVRS'. A navigation menu includes Main, Life Events, Queues, Reports, Forms, and Help. The left sidebar shows a 'Death Registration Menu' with categories: Personal Information, Medical Certification, Other Factors, Injury, Certifier, and Other Links. The main content area shows a form for '683125 :Martha Smith JUN-06-2024'. The 'Other Factors' section is expanded, showing several questions with dropdown menus: 'Autopsy Performed', 'Autopsy findings available to complete cause of death', 'If decedent was female, was decedent pregnant within the last year?' (highlighted with a red box), 'Did tobacco use contribute to death', and 'Manner of Death'. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Validate Page', 'Next', 'Clear', 'Save', and 'Return'.

- Answer options are designed to capture information on the pregnancy status at death and up to 1 year before death, regardless of the cause of death.
- If the decedent was pregnant in the past year, properly indicate the time frame in which she was pregnant, as in, at the time of death, within 42 days of death, or between 43 days and 1 year before death.
- Options are as follows:

Not pregnant within the past year
Not pregnant, but pregnant within 42 days of death
Pregnant at the time of death
Not pregnant, but pregnant 43 days to 1 year before death
Unknown if pregnant within the last year

Cause of Death Data and Public Health

- Death certificate data is an important tool to benefit public health.
- By making every effort to be accurate, we will have a clearer picture of maternal mortality in our state and can make better recommendations moving forward.

Thank you for improving public health through accurate data!

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *A Reference Guide for Certification of Deaths Associated with Pregnancy on Death Certificates*, Vital Statistics Reporting Guidance, March 2022